
GREATER BETHEL A.M.E. CHURCH

245 N.W. 8TH STREET

Designation Report



City of Miami

REPORT OF THE CITY OF MIAMI PLANNING DEPARTMENT
TO THE HERITAGE CONSERVATION BOARD
ON THE POTENTIAL DESIGNATION OF THE
GREATER BETHEL A.M.E. CHURCH
245 N.W. 8TH STREET
AS A HERITAGE CONSERVATION ZONING DISTRICT

Prepared by Sarah E. Eaton,
Historic Preservation Consultant Date

Accepted by Charles Edwin Chase
Chairman, Heritage Conservation Board Date

Designated by the Miami City Commission

Ordinance No. 10428

Date 9/27/04

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I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Historic Name:

Greater Bethel A.M.E. Church

Current Name:

Greater Bethel A.M.E. Church

Location:

245 N.W. 8th Street
Miami, Florida 33136

Present Owner:

Greater Bethel A.M.E. Church
245 N.W. 8th Street
Miami, Florida 33136

Present Use:

Religious

Present Zoning District:

CR-3/7

HC Zoning Overlay District:

HC-1

Tax Folio Number:

01-0103-050-1140

Boundary Description of HC Zoning Overlay District:

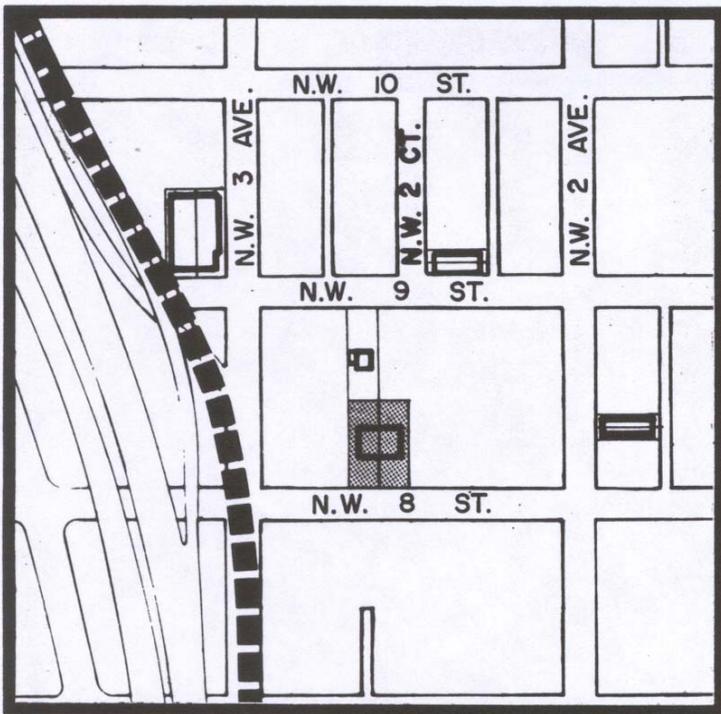
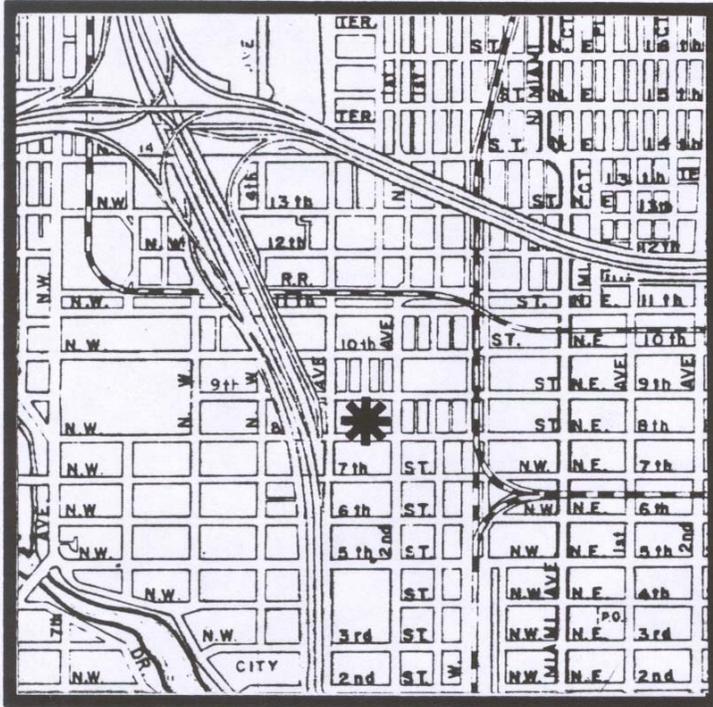
Lots 14 and 15 of the Block 35 of the plat of MIAMI NORTH (PB B-41).

HC Zoning Classification:

Historic Site

GREATER BETHEL A.M.E. CHURCH

245 N.W. 8th STREET



site plan

II. SIGNIFICANCE

Specific Date:

1927

Architect:

John Sculthorpe

Statement of Significance:

The Greater Bethel A.M.E. Church is architecturally significant because it represents one of the few examples of the Mediterranean Revival style in Overtown. The church building serves to house the oldest black congregation in Miami. The congregation was organized in March 1896, several months before the City of Miami was incorporated.

The exterior of Greater Bethel A.M.E. Church embodies the distinctive physical characteristics of a "tapered-down" Mediterranean Revival style of architecture. The appearance of the building is highly significant because it is one of the few buildings with any degree of architectural styling remaining in Overtown (originally known as "Colored Town"). The scale of the building and its façade made it one of the most imposing structures in Overtown's built environment.

The present building houses the oldest black congregation in Miami. In an article published in 1915, it was said that the church "numbers among its officers and members many of the progressive and substantial people of the city." Throughout its existence, the church has served the religious and humanitarian needs of the Overtown community.

The first structure to house the congregation was built prior to 1899 and was dubbed "Little Bethel." This building was nothing more than a simple frame structure with a dirt floor that was moved to N.W. 8th Street in 1899. The present church building was begun in 1927 but was not completed and dedicated until 31 October 1943 when all the construction was completed. The delay in completion accounts for a "pay-as-you-go" policy adopted by those responsible for building the church.

Reverend A. P. Postell started the building fund for the new church, raising more than \$7,000. The foundation for the \$150,000 church was laid by Reverend R. B. Sutton, and the church was completed and dedicated by Reverend H. W. Fayson.

Although the architect of the church has been identified as John Sculthorpe, research has failed to turn up any biographical information on him.

Relationship to Criteria for Designation:

3. Exemplifies the historical, cultural, political, economic, or social trends of the community.

Greater Bethel A. M. E. Church is historically significant because it houses the oldest black congregation in Miami.

5. Embodies those distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style, or period, or method of construction.

The church building embodies the distinctive, physical characteristics of a "tapered-down" Mediterranean Revival style of architecture.

7. Contains elements of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship of outstanding quality or which represent a significant innovation or adaptation to the South Florida environment.

The facade of Greater Bethel A. M. E. Church and the scale of the building make it one of the most imposing structures in Overtown.

III. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

Description of Building:

The Greater Bethel A. M. E. Church building is a large two-story masonry structure executed in the Mediterranean Revival architectural style. Construction of the church began in 1927 according to the plans provided by the architect John Sculthorpe. The actual completion date of the church is listed on the cornerstone as 1943.

Fronting to the south, the principal elevation of "Greater Bethel" is characterized by the double set of steps leading to the sanctuary level. The façade contains a triple-arched arrangement of doors with single doors flanking a double door. At the ends of the principal elevation are square towers with a single window opening set at the sanctuary level. The triple-arched entrance and the square towers project forward from the sanctuary itself and are characterized by a flat roof. The sanctuary is covered by a gable roof whose end faces the sidewalk. There is a stylized quatrefoil window set within the gable end.

The side elevations of the church are six bays long and contain multi-pane windows set within each bay. To the rear of the church is a projecting choir gallery. The lower floor of the church contains a principal entrance at the center of the façade elevation leading to an auditorium and meeting rooms. There are also side entrances leading to the lower floor.

The exterior of the church is embellished with a series of cast masonry bands which emphasize its Mediterranean Revival influences. There is a masonry cornice containing a stylized Romanesque arch motif that wraps itself around the principal elements of the building's façade. The window openings are set within a deep masonry surround, and stylized pilasters flank the door openings.

The interior of the church is very austere with a circular altar set in front of the choir gallery. The sanctuary seating is divided by two aisles leading to the altar. A simple masonry frieze containing stylized classical decoration wraps around the upper portion of the choir gallery recess. A cross section of the sanctuary reveals a flat ceiling delineating a simple cubical space. A triple window set at the rear of the choir gallery echoes the arrangement found at the main entrance of the sanctuary.

Although there have been some minor modifications to the church building in the way of replacement windows and blocking up of spandrel openings, the original design intent of the building is readily perceived.

Description of Site:

Greater Bethel A. M. E. Church is located in the middle of the block on the north side of N. W. 8th Street between N. W. 2nd and 3rd Streets. A parking lot is located immediately west of the church.



Greater Bethel A.M.E. Church
245 N.W. 8 Street

IV. PLANNING CONTEXT

Present Trends and Conditions:

Greater Bethel A. M. E. Church continues to be utilized by its original congregation and is one of the most prominent congregations in Overtown. The church building has been carefully maintained by the congregation, and few alterations have been made.

Greater Bethel has been identified in the Southeast Overtown/Park West Development of Regional Impact (DRI) as a historic building. It has also been nominated to the National Register of Historic Places.

Greater Bethel A.M.E. Church is also located within the proposed Historic Overtown Folklife Village, which is intended to revitalize and showcase the history of the community.

Conservation Objectives:

Greater Bethel A. M. E. Church is one of the most visible landmarks in Overtown, and its continued preservation should remain a priority. Any future changes should respect the building's architectural integrity.

These conservation objectives can best be achieved by maintaining the present zoning of the property. An HC-1 zoning overlay district will maintain the existing zoning, requiring only the review of physical changes to the property.

V. HC Zoning Elements

Boundaries:

The boundaries of the HC zoning district have been drawn to include only those lots on which the church building is located.

Major Exterior Surfaces Subject to Review:

All four facades shall be considered major exterior surfaces subject to review.

Interior Surfaces Subject to Review:

The church sanctuary shall be subject to review. Review of alterations to this space shall be guided by the U. S. Secretary of the Interior's "Standards for Rehabilitation."

Major Landscape Features Subject to Review:

The major landscape features subject to review shall include all features which are subject to the requirements for tree removal permits, as set forth in Chapter 17 of the City Code.